

ALICE BABER (1928-1982)

CV

b. 1928, Charleston, Illinois
d. 1982, New York, New York

1946-1948, Lindenwood College, St. Charles
1948-1950, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 1948-1950
1951, School of Fontainebleau, France

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

March Gallery, New York, *Baber*, 1958.
Galerie de la Librairie Anglaise, Paris, *Alice Baber peintures*, 1963.
New Vision Art Centre, London, *Alice Baber*, 1963.
Pincotheca Museum, Osaka, Japan, 1964.
Mulvane Art Center and Washburn Gallery, Topeka, 1965.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1965.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1966.
Kunstverein Museum, Cologne, Germany, 1966.
Bernard M. Baruch College, New York, 1968.
Kent State University, 1968.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1969.
Galerie Lambert, Paris, 1970.
University Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1971.
A.M. Sachs, New York, 1971.
Galerie Für Zeitgenossche Kunst, Hamburg, Germany, 1971.
Tom Bortolazzo Gallery, Santa Barbara, 1972.
Ingber Gallery, White Plains, New York, 1973.
A.M. Sachs, New York, 1973.
Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, Long Island, New York, 1973.
Iran-American Society, Tehran, Iran, 1974.
Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi, India, 1974.
Euro Kunstgalerie, Saarbrücken, Germany, 1974.
Rathaus at Benrath, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1974.
A.M. Sachs, New York, 1975.
American Library, Brussels, Belgium, 1975.
University of Alabama, Birmingham, 1975.
Palm Beach Galleries, Florida, 1975.
Lowe Gallery, University of Syracuse, New York, 1975.
McNay Institute, San Antonio, Texas, 1976.
University Art Gallery, Kansas State University, Kansas, 1976.
California Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, 1976.
William Sawyer Gallery, San Francisco, 1976.
Arvil Gallery, Mexico City, Mexico, 1976.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California, 1976.
Centro de Arte Moderno, Guadalajara, Mexico, 1977.

Centro Colombo Americano, Bogota, Colombia, 1977.
Palm Beach Galleries, Florida, 1977.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1977.
Henri Gallery, Washington, 1977.
St. Mary's College of Maryland Gallery, St. Mary's City, Maryland, *Color, Light, and Image*, 1977.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1978.
National Museum, El Salvador, 1978.
Kunst-Galerie, Switzerland, 1978.
Allen House Galleries, Louisville, Kentucky, 1978.
Frances Aronson Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, 1978.
Allen House Galleries, Louisville, Kentucky, 1978.
Frances Aronson Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, 1978.
The Art Package Ltd, Highland Park, Illinois, 1978.
Niagara University, Niagara Falls, New York, 1979.
The Art Package Ltd., Chicago, Illinois, 1979.
Gallery West, Los Angeles, California, 1980.
Galerie de l'Arte Nueva, Lima, Peru, 1980.
Amerika Haus, Frankfurt, Germany, 1980.
Lillian Heidenberg, Gallery, New York, 1981.
Musee d'Arte Haitien, College St. Pierre, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, *Aquarelles & Lithographies*, 1982.
The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1982.
George Fall Gallery, Paris, France, 1982.
Phoenix II, Washington, D.C., 1982.
The American Centre, Port-of-Spain, *A Journey of Light and Color*, 1983.
Edgar Country Bicentennial Art Center and Museum, Paris, Illinois, *Alice Baber: A Retrospective Exhibition*, 1983.
Galeria de Arte Moderno, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, *Alice Baber: Luz Y Color*, 1983.
National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica, *Watercolours and Lithographs*, 1983.
The Elaine Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York, *Benefit Sale of Paintings, Watercolors and Graphics by Alice Baber*, 1983.
Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, Indiana, *Alice Baber: Color Hunger*, 2019.
Berry Campbell, New York, *Alice Baber: Reverse Infinity*, 2024.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Stable Gallery, New York, *Annual*, 1957.
Galerie Fur Zeitgenossiche Kunst, Hamburg, *GEDOK*, 1961.
Deuxieme Biennale de Paris, *Artists under 35*, 1961.
Jeune Bienale, France, 1961.
American Embassy, U.S.I.S, London, *Modern American Painting*, 1961. (traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland, 1962.)
Musee de la Ville de Paris, France, *Les Surindependents*, 1962.
Karl Flinker Gallery, Paris, *4 Man Show*, 1962.
New Vision Centre Gallery, London, *International Graphics*, 1963.
Galerie Wirth Berlin, Berlin, Germany, *Artists from New Vision Centre Gallery*, 1964.
Pinocotheca Museum, Osaka, Japan, *2-Man Show with Gutai Group*, 1964.
Worcester Museum of Art, Massachusetts, *New Acquisitions*, 1964.
Peter Stuyvesant Collection, Holland, *Art in Industry*, 1964. (traveled globally)

Ambassador's Residence United States Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, Geneva, Switzerland, *Art*, 1965.
A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, *Art for Christmas*, 1965.
Mulvane Art Center and Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, *Selected Painters*, 1965.
Museum show, Manchester, England *Trends*, 1965.
Peter Stuyvesant Collection, Holland, *Art in Industry*, 1966.
Kunstverein, Cologne, 1966.
American Embassy, USIS, Paris, 1966.
Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany, 1966.
New Vision Centre, London, *International Graphics*, 1966.
Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, *W.I.A.C. Exhibition*, 1966.
Musee des Arts Decoratifs (Louvre), Paris, 1966.
Maison de la Culture de Havre, France, *Le Havre International Exhibition*, 1966-1967.
Sheldon Swope Art Gallery, Terre Haute, Indiana, *Looking Backward over 25 Years*, 1967.
Kent State University, Ohio, *Third Kent Invitational*, 1968.
Eisenstadt Schloss, Austria, 1969.
Amerika Haus, Vienna, 1970.
Whitney Annual, New York, 1970.
The Art Galleries, University of California, Santa Barbara, *Trends in 20th Century Art*, 1970.
Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, *A New Consciousness: The CIBA-Geigy Collection*, 1971.
Galerie Fur Zeitgenossiche Kunst, Gedok in Hamburg, 1971.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California, *Ala Story Collection*, 1971.
Tarmac Collection, *Art in Industry*, 1971. (traveled to Europe, U.S.A., Canada)
Amerika Haus, Berlin, Hamburg and *Die Amerikanische Malerei*, 1972.
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, *Contemporary American Painting*, 1972.
Huntington Galleries, University of Texas, Austin, *Color Forum*, 1972. (Curated by Alice Baber)
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Color show*, 1972.
Center for 20th Century Studies and Fine Arts, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, *National Invitational Exhibition: Women in the Arts*, 1972.
Stanford Museum, Connecticut, *Women's Exhibition*, 1972.
Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York, *Painting and Sculpture*, 1972.
Inger Gallery, Stanford, Connecticut, *Women in the Arts*, 1972.
Brandeis University Libraries, New Jersey, *Artists in Residence – Six One Man Shows*, 1973.
Lowenstein Library Gallery (Fordham University at Lincoln Center), New York, *IX Painters, IX Styles*, 1973.
New York Cultural Center, New York, *Women Choose Women*, 1973.
New York Cultural Center, New York, *Works on Paper*, 1973.
New York Cultural Center, New York, *Works by Women*, 1973.
Graduate Center of City University, 1973.
CUNY Graduate Center Mall, New York, 1973.
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey, *The Harold and May Rosenberg Collection*, 1973.
Kresge Art Center Gallery, East Lansing, Michigan, *Works from the CIBA-Geigy Collection by 46 Women Artists*, 1974. (traveled to Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Greensboro)
Summit Art Center, New Jersey, *Works on Paper from the CIBA-GEIGY Collection*, 1974.
Landmark Gallery, inc. ,New York, *118 artists*, 1974.
Brooklyn College, New York, 1974.
Lehigh University, Pennsylvania, 1974.
Women's Interart Center, New York, *Games*, 1974.
Battery and Central Park, New York, *New York Professional Women Artists: Walk-Through Art*, 1974.
Joe and Emily Lowe Gallery, Syracuse University, New York, *Contemporary Paintings*, 1974-75.

College of Creative Studies, Brooklyn College, New York, *Faculty Exhibition*, 1974.
UNESCO, Paris, *Feminine 75*, 1975.
U.S.I.S. Cultural Center, Nairobi, Kenya, *4 American Artists*, 1975.
Bayonne Jewish Community Center, Bayonne, New Jersey, *Six Artists*, 1975.
The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, *The Year of The Woman*, 1975.
N.Y. Cultural Center, New York, 1975.
Women's Interart Center, New York, *Color, Light & Image*, 1975. (Curated by Alice Baber)
Lowenstein Library Gallery, Fordham University, New York, *Visual Artists Coalition Exhibition*, 1975.
Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C., *Remember the Ladies: Women in America 1750-1815*, 1976.
Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, San Antonio, Texas, *American Artists '76: A Celebration*, 1976.
Housatonic Community College, Bridgeport, Connecticut, *American Women Painters*, 1976.
Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, Long Island, *group show*, 1976.
America House, Hamburg, Germany, *American Art in '76, Seven Young American Painters*, 1976.
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, *A.M. Sachs Gallery Artists*, 1977.
New York University, Contemporary Arts Gallery, New York, *Visual Artists Coalition*, 1977.
Association of Artist-Run Galleries, New York, *Tenth Street Days: The Co-ops of the 50's*, 1977.
Landmark Gallery, New York, *Tenth Street in 1977*, 1977.
Adelphi University Alumni House Gallery, New York, *Visual Artists Coalition Exhibition*, 1977.
Clayworks Studio Workshop, New York, *Celebration Exhibition*, 1978.
Women's Interart Center, New York, *Women Artists: Sketch Books*, 1978.
CUNY Graduate Center Mall, New York, *Women Artists '78: Painting, Graphics, Sculpture*, 1978.
WARM, Minneapolis, Minnesota, *Women Invite Women*, 1978.
Ingber Gallery, New York, *Art as Furniture, Furniture as Art*, 1979.
Guild Hall, East Hampton, Long Island, *group sponsored by the American Association of University Women*, 1979.
American Embassy, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, *des salles de sejour*, 1981.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California, *Colorscope: Abstract Painting from the Permanent Collection, 1960-1979*, 2010.
Riverside Art Museum, California, *90 Years of Ink: Prints from RAM's Permanent Collection, 1920-2010*, 2019.
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, *Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas 1958-1983*, 2020.
Ashawagh Hall, Springs, New York, *Community*, 2022.
The Barn, Frampton Co., Bridgehampton, New York, *Women Choose Women*, 2023.
Berry Campbell, New York, *Perseverance*, 2024.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria
American Warranty Corporation, Los Angeles, California
Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, California
Art for American Embassies, U.S. Department of State
Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, Little Rock, Arkansas
Avon Corporation
Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, California
Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, India
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas

Broad Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, Colombia
CIBA-Geigy Corporation, New York, New York
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
Cremona Foundation Collection and Archive, Mechanicsville, Maryland
David Owsley Museum of Art, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, California
Fordham University, New York, New York
Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
Grey Art Museum, New York University, New York, New York
Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York
Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
Kenton Corporation
Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany
Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida
Manchester Museum, Manchester, England
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas
Marinotti Collection, Italy
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
Michener Collection, University of Texas, Austin, Texas
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
Museum of Modern Art, Bogotá, Colombia
Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
National Art Gallery, San Salvador, El Salvador
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
Newark Museum of Art, Newark, New Jersey
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, Connecticut
Peter Stuyvesant Collection, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts
Roy R. Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, Purchase, New York
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California
Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, Indiana
The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan
The University of Alabama, Birmingham, Alabama
U.S. Embassy, Madrid, Spain
U.S. Embassy, New Delhi, India
U.S. Embassy National Loan Program in Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America
United Tanker Ltd., New York, New York
University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina

BERRY CAMPBELL

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White House Loan Collection, Washington, D.C.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York
Worcester Museum of Art, Worcester, Massachusetts
Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin

ALICE BABER (1928–1982)

An artist in the Abstract Expressionist and Color Field traditions, Alice Baber created paintings of radiant luminosity in motion, expressing energies of color-infused air and wind in limitless space.

To Baber, an abstract painting was “outer space.” She stated in an interview with Paul Cummings in 1973 that in front of an abstract painting “there is a sense of infinity.” She liked the idea of “infinity coming way forward, so that you have reverse infinity.”¹ “Celestial painting,” is the summary given to Baber’s work by the novelist James Jones. In a 1963 essay he described her paintings as her own “personal rearrangement of Reality, in which she strove for the impossible and Tragic: the effort of seeing light, which only exists for us in reflections from objects, for itself.”² Her paintings, in oil and acrylic, are a form of spiritual displacement, as if we ourselves could dissolve into their light and atmosphere.

Baber packed a tremendous amount of achievement into a life cut too short when she died from cancer in 1982 at age fifty-four. She lived for several years in Paris, and traveled widely, spending time in Japan, India, Korea, Latin America, and Iran. Her paintings have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and in the locations she visited, and her work is included in over forty American and European museums. Her paintings also form the nucleus of the Baber Midwest Modern Art Collection of the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette (Indiana), and Guild Hall, in East Hampton, houses the Alice Baber Memorial Art Library. In addition to her art, Baber was active as a teacher, curator, lecturer, and writer. She was an artist-in-residence at the University of New Mexico’s Tamarind Institute lithography workshop (Albuquerque) and taught painting at the New School, New York; the University of California, Santa Barbara; and the University of California, Berkeley. She worked in several capacities to promote the work and careers of women artists. Among shows she organized were *Color Forum*, held in 1972 at the University of Texas, Austin (for which she wrote the catalogue), and *Color, Light, and Image*, held in 1975 at the Women’s Interart Center, New York, a show of artists in recognition of the United Nations International Women’s Year.

Baber developed a unique stain-and-lift technique that resulted in the translucent weightlessness in her art. She started her works with the “driving force of color.” Adding additional colors to reinforce their glow, they produced a “psychodynamic balance in midair,” in which there are “mythical whirlpools between the larger forms.”³ At the same time, her way of seeing derived from her close study of past art in museums and travels. She loved “the idea of something swinging through space” in Fragonard’s *The Swing*, 1767 (Wallace Collection, London). At the Frick, she felt Goya’s *The Forge*, ca. 1815–20 was “the most complete painting of the figure that’s ever been done,” observing the “black lines, which are created both by the costume and the artist just deciding to use a black line.” She admired the work of Carpaccio, finding in one painting a horizontal that resembled a mountainscape. At The Metropolitan, she discovered there was “a great deal about drawing” that she could learn from Rubens. She felt an attachment to India, where she traveled twice and surrounded herself with “the color that seems to me to be the way life really is.” She stated to Cummings: “So you see everything for me is not one thing, but a dozen other things.”⁴

Early Life and Education

The younger of two sisters, Alice Baber was born in the farming community of Charleston, Illinois, near the border of Indiana.⁵ She grew up both in nearby Kansas, Illinois, and Miami, Florida,

where, on a doctor's orders, her family spent winters due to Alice's poor health. The Babers lived in a part of Miami near the Everglades where one of Alice's earliest memories is of "green rain, light filtered through bushes on a wall." She later recalled that all the days she remembered from her childhood "were in color."⁶ Liking the shape of letters when she was learning to read, Baber decided at age five that she would be a poet or painter. As she was always drawing, she soon focused on the latter and at age eight, she received lessons in painting from Paul Turner Sargent, in an adult summer class at Eastern Illinois State Teachers College in Charleston, Illinois. At age twelve she took a college-level painting class, studying drawing and perspective.

In 1946, Baber enrolled in Lindenwood College (now Lindenwood University), in St. Charles, Missouri, which was then a women's college. There she majored in art, studying with Elizabeth Watts, who instilled in her an appreciation of modern art. Encouraged by Watts—the only art instructor at Lindenwood—Baber transferred in 1948 to the University of Indiana, Bloomington (majoring in painting and journalism), which she felt was "quite beautiful," with an atmosphere "sort of [like a] Dutch landscape; it's very flat with a few trees."⁷ At the university, her most influential teacher was the figurative expressionist Alton Pickens. After receiving her B.A., she went on to obtain her M.A. degree from the university in 1951. On graduation, Pickens insisted that she move to New York. Baber felt his advice was part of a pattern in which, throughout her life, people encouraged her to move on. Yet she also perceived such transience to be her own inclination, while it gave her the "slightly uncomfortable feeling of not belonging to any place."⁸ This physical movement can be matched to the buoyancy and ephemerality in her art.

1950s

In 1951, Baber traveled to France, where she studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, Fontainebleau. Subsequently, following Pickens's suggestion, she moved to Manhattan, settling at first in the Chelsea Hotel and supporting herself by producing publicity about home furnishings. (Eventually she became an art editor at *McCalls* magazine.) In New York, she took drawing classes at the Art Students League and visited museums, especially the Metropolitan. She also took an active role in the downtown art scene, where she became part of The Club (begun in 1949), an informal salon for avant-garde artists, in which performances, panel discussions, and exhibitions were held in a variety of downtown studios. Baber enjoyed the club gatherings, where there was "always a lively quality" and where she interacted with all the artists she had heard of, read about, and admired.⁹ In the mid-1960s, she became one of The Club's prime movers, reviving it at a time when it was in decline.¹⁰ She worked on programming with the noted art historian Irving Sandler and joined Philip Pavia (one of the founding members) and others to reinstate Friday night panels. Among those she led were panels on color, one in which museum directors were invited to speak, and another that demonstrated a Noh play, with an interpreter from the Japan Society.¹¹ Baber was also instrumental in the 23rd Street Workshop Club, the successor to The Club. There she formed a discussion group dedicated to Color, later known as Color Forum.

By 1957, Baber was living in New York's Bedford Mews and had a studio on Thompson Street. In April of that year, she was featured in a five-artist show at March Gallery (95 East Tenth Street).

Dore Ashton began her review in the *New York Times* by noticing Baber's "full-blown brightly expressionist interiors and still lifes."¹² In May, Baber was included in the sixth and last annual Stable Gallery show, held at 924 Seventh Avenue. The prestigious downtown showcase included works selected by artists featured in the previous year's annual.¹³ In the summer of 1958, Baber was invited to Yaddo. The artist's retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York, begun in 1926, was intended to nurture the creative process by providing an opportunity for artists and writers to work without interruption in a supportive environment.

Baber had left behind still life to become a fully abstract painter by the time of her first solo exhibition, held in October 1958 at March Gallery. A review in *Artnews* commented that while Baber studied at the University of Indiana, "her pictures speak with a New York accent, though not impersonally so." The reviewer remarked that in free abstractions, Baber "paints a world in which everything is gloriously falling," taking note of *Everglades*, in which "bending yellow light into blue-green strokes" expound "her grasp of the intricacy of surface, a restless movement that coils and lifts upon itself."¹⁴ In 1958, Baber began a pattern of spending six months of the year in Paris. There she joined other North American painters, including Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, Shirley Jaffe, and Paul Jenkins, in a group called École Pacifique. In Paris, Baber met Sonia Delaunay, on whose art she published an article in 1973.¹⁵

In April 1959, when Baber was included in a show at Tenth Street gallery, New York, of the work of eleven artists, a reviewer observed that she had transmuted "the fruits and vegetables of past canvases into a circular calligraphy of emotional yellows and oranges."¹⁶ In that year, her work was selected for the *Jeune Biennale* of the American Cultural Center in Paris, in which Helen Frankenthaler was also featured. In the years that followed, she took part in shows in Paris, London, Edinburgh, and Hamburg.

1960s

On June 16, 1964, Baber married Paul Jenkins in New Haven, Connecticut. Later that year both became artists-in-residence at the Gutai Pinocotheca, a newly established museum space in Osaka, where they showed their work in a joint exhibition. The artists traveled in Japan as well as in India and Tibet. Together they collected affordable art and artefacts in the places they visited. Their marriage ended in 1968, and subsequently Baber made New York her home base.

By 1965, Baber had become affiliated with the A. M. Sachs Gallery on 57th Street, where solo shows of her work were mounted in 1965, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1978. All of these exhibitions received extensive and favorable press. A review in *Artnews* in 1965 observed that Baber's abstract paintings consisted of both "soft, light-puffed forms edging close to one another [that] float high, out of reach [and] paintings with darker colors [that] make an effective bang— like cannons firing together."¹⁷ Reviews in *Artnews* and the *New York Times* in 1966 focused on Baber's luminous colors—jumping, hopping, beating, and leaping "between islands to pulsate at different speeds, throbbing in one area, and then flowing easily" and drifting "lyrically over a white field toward a gentle vortex."¹⁸ A reviewer in *Artnews* in 1969 stated that Baber's compositions had become more "complex and liberated," and described the convergence in

them of the natural and cosmic, commenting: “Baber lets go a skyward path of colored disks speeding along like tumbleweed,” which both spin toward the viewer and then “ascend like colored skyrockets, curving towards pinpoints in the sky.” As the reviewer noted, the circle had become Baber’s prime means of separating figure and ground but then “due to some squeezing,” the circle “connects in the continuum of space . . . pushed into ovoids and unstable shapes that seek movement.” The reviewer concluded: “her chips of colored sky are a fresh phenomenon. They soar in the imagination.”¹⁹

1970s

A review in *Artnews* of Baber’s 1971 show at Sachs perceived that she was deepening her paintings by supplanting their staccato motion with “continuous modulations,” in which disc shapes were “still discernible, but lambent colors overlap and coalesce into related hues.”²⁰ In the *New York Times*, James R. Mellow observed that Baber’s abstract imagery was consistent—translucent oval or ameboid forms that are marvelous for their radiance and delicacy of their colors—while harking “back to older conventions,” in her preference for “the subtle inflections of color and brushwork that indicate the signature of the artist, so to speak, rather than the impeccable surfaces, the machine-finished look that many hard-core serialists favor.” He commented that her works could be enjoyed individually for their “quite beautiful and deft . . . handling of forms and colors,” while their cleverness can be appreciated when seeing them “en masse.”²¹

In April 1973, A. M. Sachs held two concurrent shows of Baber’s work, one of her recent paintings at its 57th Street gallery, and a larger show of both recent and earlier work at a new location at 141 Prince Street in Soho. The two exhibitions were, in essence, a retrospective. Covering the show in *Artforum*, Roberta Smith (who began her long career as an art critic for the *New York Times* in 1986) reviewed Baber’s progression commenting that it was “fairly consistent and developed,” while her last paintings were triptychs with shapes “distributed separately and evenly over the entire surface.”²² By 1973, Baber had become active in the Feminist movement, especially by promoting women artists, in an awareness that their representation in museums lagged far behind what was deserved, given the quality and quantity of their art over time. Women in the Arts, an organization that sought to remedy this neglect, organized *Women Choose Women*, held in January 1973 at the New York Cultural Center. The exhibition included paintings and sculpture by one hundred women selected by the women themselves. In a review of the exhibition in the *New York Times*, Rosalyn Drexler gave recognition to Baber, along with Joan Mitchell, Nell Blaine, and Mary Frank as among the women already known to the public. Other artists included were Nancy Spero, Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, and Hannah Wilkie. Drexler voiced her hope that the exhibition would be a new awareness of the originality and diversity of the work of women artists.²³ Indeed, this is an aim that is still a work in progress. The show was accompanied by a catalogue with an introductory essay by Lucy Lippard. In February in a session organized by the Women’s Caucus for art at the College Art Association in Chicago, Baber spoke on the importance of the documentation of exhibitions in the fight for the recognition of women artists.²⁴

Baber's 1975 exhibition at Sachs in July-August 1975 received a long review by the artist/critic Al Brunelle in *Art in America*. Brunelle described Baber's art, in general, as "romantic and lyrical" and "also reductive and systematic." He remarked that her "spectrum color" was "pure and ideal, like mathematics," while her modest ameboid shapes are like nature—vital, primal, potential, like unicellular life." He stated: "each element transforms the other yet simultaneously functions in a direct and unimpeded fashion." To Brunelle, Baber's new works—now revealing the luminous white ground of the canvas—supplanted the "radiant liquidity of the earlier work" with a "liquid radiance," in which matter seemed "to be synonymous with becoming," conveying "the totality of the possibilities of giving form to being." He wrote: "Aside from these fictions, there is nothing else there but light."²⁵ When Baber's work was again on view at Sachs in February 1977, Grace Glueck observed that her palette had "become paler," in paintings with "a lovely quiet lyricism." Glueck was drawn especially to the "very light canvases in which color is almost a trace element."²⁶

Baber continued her involvement in the women's movement in a focus on women in the arts. Along with artists Alice Neel and Louise Nevelson and the Feminist writer and activist Kate Millett, she became a trustee of the Women's Interart Center, New York, a complex that also included a museum.²⁷ The works in Baber's last show at Sachs, held in December 1978, were her "palest to date," according to Margaret Betz in *Artnews*. Included were *The Jaguar Speaks to the Mountain of Light (I, II and III)*, inspired by a trip Baber took to Machu Picchu. There she was confronted by a fierce storm which cloaked the ancient Inca site in clouds, from which she felt the divinity spoke to her. Betz commented on a watercolor series on view, titled "Sacred Space," inspired by Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1959). Betz wrote that the series implied "whole cosmologies as one color spot bleeds into another." Other works, as noted by Betz, consisted of one basic diagonal across the canvas. Betz stated: "For Baber, art is not only an esthetic undertaking but communication of greater forces."²⁸

1980–82

In September–October 1981, the artist Ann McCoy published an article on Baber in *Art International*, in which she argued that Baber's art belonged more with that of James Turrell, Hap Tivey, and Dan Flavin, sculptors whose medium was light, than with stain painters such as Morris Louis, Jenkins, Francis, and Frankenthaler. As McCoy stated, Baber did not use the accidental methods of stain painting. Instead, her method was careful and precise, and her focus was not on paint application but on the action of light itself, of giving light the effect of looking "real" rather than painted. What she achieved, according to McCoy was a "thousand varieties of celestial lights in the lighter works; or [a thousand] in the underworld light of the Bardo in the darker works."²⁹

In April 1981, a solo show of Baber's work was mounted by Heidenberg Gallery (50 West 57th Street), which took over her representation from Sachs. In a review in *Artnews*, Gerrit Henry described Baber as a "lyrical abstractionist par excellence," but felt her paintings were "not all as lighthearted and lyrical as they may seem," with a "subtext" in which "her painting is the storm

beneath the calm.”³⁰ In June 1982, Baber was included with Jack Youngerman, and other gallery artists in a Heidenberg summer show. That spring–summer, she was the subject of two articles in the *Woman’s Art Journal*. Sylvia Moore provided an overview of her art and career.³¹ Alexandra de Lallier discussed her work in watercolor, a medium she first used in the 1950s. De Lallier observed that toward the middle of that decade, Baber’s explorations in oil and watercolor “began to relate and converge,” and her method of “sinking” and “lifting” in oil came from her discoveries in watercolor’s softness and resonances of light. In her discussion of Baber’s development, de Lallier described the cycle Baber was creating at the time, *The Turn of the Wind of the Mountain*, in which she continued floating horizontal compositions of “shapes that are circles becoming triangles becoming diamonds that stretch across a white field in mountain-range breadth.” De Lallier concluded that over the past twenty-five years, Baber had given to each of her media “the unifying substance of her ‘prismatic metamorphosis.’”³²

By the time the two articles were published, Baber was fighting a losing battle with cancer in which she deployed her “pure and exquisite artistry . . . in a last, gallant rear-guard action,” as noted in *Twenty-Five Artists*, a book published in 1982 featuring photographs taken of the artists by Hans Namuth. Namuth photographed Baber at work in her studio wearing a metal halo vest and gazing with gentle recognition toward the viewer.³³ The image conveys the poignancy of Baber’s artistic journey. She sustained herself with the radiance and impermanence of light as she traveled across the globe. She died in New York on October 2, 1982 and was buried near her childhood home near Kansas, Illinois.

Posthumous Recognition

At the time of Baber’s death, a retrospective of her work was on view at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. The show traveled to museums across the country through 1983. Subsequently little attention was given to Baber’s work. When examples of her art were included in 1997 in *Colors: Contrasts and Cultures*, at the Discovery Museum, Bridgeport, William Zimmer praised Baber in his review in the *New York Times*, for her “personal and precise musings on various colors” and for using “color with a complex support structure.”³⁴ In 2023, Baber’s art returned to the public eye in the exhibition, *Alice Baber: Color Hunger*, organized by Luxembourg + Co and shown in New York and London. Representing Baber’s estate, Berry Campbell Gallery will further reinstate Baber’s significance in the annals of her time, revealing the tenuous strength of an art of color and light, as beautifully resonant today as in the past.

Lisa N. Peters, Ph.D.

¹ Oral history interview with Alice Baber, conducted by Paul Cummings, May 24, 1973, Archives of American Art (AAA), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

² James Jones, “Alice Baber (1963),” in Arlene Bujese, ed., *Twenty-Five Artists* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications, 1982), pp. 30–31.

³ Alice Baber, *Color Forum*, exh. cat. (Austin, Tx.: University Art Museum, 1972), p. 8.

⁴ AAA interview.

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- ⁵ Her parents were Adin B. Baber (1892–1974) and Lois Mary Shoot Baber (1892–1943). Her sister was Nancy S. Baber (1926–2005).
- ⁶ Susan W. Cutter, *Alice Baber, Painter* (New York: Women in the Arts, 1975), p. 7.
- ⁷ AAA interview.
- ⁸ AAA interview.
- ⁹ AAA interview.
- ¹⁰ Grace Glueck, “Art Notes: The Club Creeps Back,” *New York Times*, December 25, 1966, p. 18D.
- ¹¹ AAA interview.
- ¹² Dore Ashton, “Art: Works by Browne,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1957, p. 36.
- ¹³ On the exhibition, see Dore Ashton, “Art: A Local Anthology,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1957, p. 58.
- ¹⁴ J. S., “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 57 (October 1958), p. 16.
- ¹⁵ Alice Baber, “Sonia Delaunay,” *Craft Horizons* (December 1973), pp. 32–39.
<https://digital.craftcouncil.org/digital/collection/p15785coll2/id/9380/rec/1>, accessed December 17, 2023.
- ¹⁶ I.H.S., “Tenth Street,” *Artnews* 58 (April 1959), p. 16.
- ¹⁷ “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 64 (November 1965), p. 12.
- ¹⁸ N.E., “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 65 (November 1966), p. 10; “Alice Baber,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1966, [add page]
- ¹⁹ N. E., “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 68 (May 1969), p. 14.
- ²⁰ N. E., “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 70 (April 1971), p. 8.
- ²¹ James R. Mellow, “Today’s Series Line-Up: Baber and Baer,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1971, p. D27.
- ²² Roberta Pancoast Smith, “Alice Baber,” *Artforum* 11 (April 1973).
- ²³ Rosalyn Drexler, “Women on Their Own,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1973, p. 129.
- ²⁴ Mary Stofflet, “Women Caucus for Art at the C.A.A.,” *Feminist Art Journal* 5 (Summer 1976), p. 38.
- ²⁵ Al Brunelle, “Alice Baber at Sachs,” *Art in America* (July–August 1975), p. 105.
- ²⁶ Grace Glueck, “Alice Baber,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1977, p. C17.
- ²⁷ Vera Goodman, “New Directions for Women” *New Directions for Women* 2 (Summer 1976), p. 6.
- ²⁸ Margaret Betz, “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 77 (December 1978), pp. 155–56.
- ²⁹ Ann McCoy, “Alice Baber: Light as Subject,” *Art International* 24 (September–October 1980), pp. 135–40.
- ³⁰ Gerrit Henry, “Alice Baber,” *Artnews* 79 (June 1981), p. 240.
- ³¹ Sylvia Moore, “Alice Baber,” *Women’s Art Journal* 3 (Spring–Summer 1982), pp. 40–44.
- ³² Alexandria de Lallier, “The Watercolors of Alice Baber,” *Women’s Art Journal* 3 (Spring–Summer 1982), pp. 44–46.
- ³³ *Twenty-five Artists*, p. 7.
- ³⁴ William Zimmer, “Color, So Much the Essence of What Happens in a Painting: A Roundup,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1997, p. CT14.